

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

February 9, 2005

The Honorable Gale A. Norton
Secretary of the Interior
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Madam Secretary:

We are writing to bring to your attention new evidence that politics is interfering with the scientific mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS).

Attached is a letter we received today from the Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS) and Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER). These groups surveyed more than 1,400 field scientists in all of the FWS's regions. Based on over 400 responses to the survey, they conclude that "political intervention to alter scientific results has become pervasive within the Fish and Wildlife Service."

The survey results are striking. Of the respondents whose work is related to technical analysis, nearly a quarter "have been directed to inappropriately exclude or alter technical information from a USFWS scientific document." Similarly, of the respondents whose work centers on endangered species, 44% "have been directed, for non-scientific reasons, to refrain from making ... findings that are protective of species."

Written comments from FWS scientists are also telling. One scientist wrote, "FWS regional HQ, DOI and White House leadership are so hostile to our mission that they will subvert, spin or even illegitimize our findings." Another scientist wrote about never before having seen "so many findings and recommendations by the field be turned around at the regional and Washington level."

The political influence has had a clear impact on morale at the FWS. One scientist writes that "biologists on the bottom just try to keep their heads down and stay out of trouble," another writes, "all we can do at the field level is ensure that our administration record is complete and hope we get sued by an environmental or conservation organization."

FWS managers sought to prevent employees from responding to the survey, even off work hours. An e-mail from managers in Region 3 warned employees that they are "not to respond to surveys that have not been approved by the Washington Office ... this applies whether they respond in the office or from home." Employees in Region 1 were told that "this is NOT a survey that employees are authorized to respond to."

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The picture that emerges is appalling. The Fish and Wildlife Service's credibility rests on its scientific integrity. If political agendas are allowed to overrule science, that credibility will be compromised.

We urge you to make restoring the scientific integrity of FWS one of your top priorities and to provide us with your response to these disturbing findings by March 4, 2005.

Sincerely,



Henry A. Waxman
Ranking Minority Member
Committee on Government Reform



Nick J. Rahall, II
Ranking Minority Member
Committee on Resources

Enclosure